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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000664

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E  
STATE ALSO PASS USAID

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [SCUL](#) [DJ](#) [PDEM](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI'S INTERIOR MINISTER ACCEPTS EMBASSY OFFER  
OF ELECTORAL ASSESSMENT

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Minister of Interior Yacin Elmi Bouh has agreed to accept the visit of a USAID-funded team that would assess Djibouti's current electoral laws and plans for decentralization. The approval came in his meeting July 10 at Interior headquarters with Ambassador and Embassy Djibouti's USAID Representative.

12. (C) The Minister explained that his government wanted to hold regional elections -- a first for Djibouti -- in the end of the December, 2005 time frame. Ambassador noted that there were a number of unresolved concerns about Djibouti's electoral system that emerged in the most recent elections in April for the president. Most had been raised by the opposition. It might be helpful to the process to address them before regional elections. One was the stated advantage of proportional representation over the current system of majority representation and another was accuracy of electoral lists. She asked the Minister about progress in these areas.

13. (C) The Minister said efforts were underway to update the electoral lists but that there may not be sufficient time to do so fully before regional elections. He noted plans that would be implemented in October to move this forward. However, the Minister continued, the government would surely satisfy this requirement in time for parliamentary elections in 2008. Bouh also said proportional vs. majority representation was an issue currently being reviewed by the government. Later in the meeting, with further probing from USAID Director, the Minister said he did not think the issue of proportional representation would actually meet Djibouti's needs. He explained that for Djibouti's stability, assuring ethnic balance in representation in electoral bodies was more important than assuring political party balance.

14. (C) USAID Director noted that there are examples of countries in Africa that have been able to have proportional representation while maintaining the ethnic balance the leadership sought. She advised the Minister of USAID's willingness to be of help in this and other areas. Yet to do so financially, USAID would need first to complete a formal assessment of Djibouti's needs. She told the Minister that a team could be organized to come to Djibouti before the end of July to do so and could complete its work within two weeks. This would serve to allay some of the Minister's expressed concerns about timing of such an assessment in view of the government's desire to move forward with December elections. She further explained that the team could take a look as well at the country's overall decentralization plan and make specific recommendations.

15. (C) After allaying his concerns about the timeline to complete an assessment, the Minister expressed his concurrence. He also expressed a willingness to entertain other programs USAID might develop to support decentralization and training of political parties, including the opposition. In addition, the Minister expressed his willingness to support programs that would encourage a free and independent press in Djibouti as well as strengthen civil society. Embassy notes that such programs would dovetail well with its Mission Program Plan goals in democratization and human rights.

16. (C) Comment: USAID reform programs support the Embassy's MPP goal in democratization. There also appears to be government will for reform in the key areas noted, but deep wariness about the implications of reform for the ethnic divide that continues to impact negatively the Djiboutian nation. Concern expressed about the benefits of one form of representation over another is but one manifestation of this. The government did make an effort at dialogue with the political opposition through its week-long decentralization conference (closed to the public) that ended a few days ago. The opposition declined to participate, as it has in other government-sponsored efforts at dialogue, clinging to its continued calls for revised electoral lists, application of former civil war peace accords and a myriad of other demands. Without a census (which we believe the government would

ultimately agree to accept) and complete overhaul of electoral lists, the opposition is unlikely to be appeased. USG assistance with an assessment of real systemic needs is all the more imperative. End comment.  
RAGSDALE